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BOOKS

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2013 D3

Swept away by McCrumb's 'ballad novel'

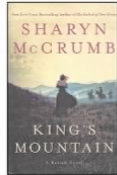
When Sharyn McCrumb jumps into a history story, it's like Robin Williams taking on the role of the genie in Aladdin. Boy, does she have fun embodying a host of characters.

Now, with "King's Mountain," her 10th "ballad novel" and 25th book, she spends a couple of weeks fighting the Revolutionary War. McCrumb brings her novel and her engaging speaking style to several locations over the next two weeks (see box).

**Plus:** Col. John Sevier is McCrumb's primary narrator. He interacts with dozens of figures brought to life from diaries, reports and deeds.

Narrator No. 2 is "Virginia Sal," a mountain girl who sews, cooks and reclines for British Maj. Patrick Ferguson (who is the third narrator, in a solo chapter). Don't let Sal's bedside service deter you from recommending "King's Mountain" to young adults as well as adults. It's not a notable part of the story, except that it helps represent Sal's survival mode and McCrumb's modus operandi: spunky, pragmatic mountain girls must not be excluded from the big picture.

Throughout her career, McCrumb has shined as one of the native truth-tellers about Appalachian experience and character in the face of a tradition of stereotyping by opportunists, romantics and propagandists.



Sharyn McCrumb

**AUTHOR EVENTS**

- **Thursday:** Morganton Library, 204 S. King St., Morganton, 6 p.m. (764-9360)
- **Friday:** Reunion of King's Mountain descendants, dinner, and talk. The Orchard at Altapass, Spruce Pine, Mile 128.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The dinner costs \$15. (919-9531; www.altapassorchard.org)
- **Saturday:** City Lights Book Store, 3 East Jackson St., Sylva, 6:30 p.m. (506-9499)
- **Sept. 29:** Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 3 p.m., 254-6734.
- **Sept. 30:** Black Bear Books, Boone Mall, 2146 Blowing Rock Road, Boone, 7 p.m. (264-4636)
- **Oct. 1:** Blue Ridge Books, 152 Main St., Waynesville, 6 p.m. (664-6003)

**FACTOID**

Sharyn McCrumb's seven-time great-grandmother, Krinah Robertson, was married to John Sevier's brother Robert, who died in the King's Mountain campaign. Krinah later married Maj. Jonathan Tipton, Sevier's second-in-command there, and McCrumb's male ancestor.

For instance, who can forget the scene in "The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter," when east Tennessee native Tavy Amis, dying from cancer, challenges a paper company exec to drink the water from the Little Dove (read, Pigeon) River that his plant has polluted.

The trait that McCrumb's favorite characters embrace — stoicism mixed with mysticism and implacability — is part of a heritage. Whereas "King's Mountain" is not one of McCrumb's most com-

plex novels, the irony that pervades the thinking of the mountain men and women in this chronological tale of bravery and triumph makes it deeper than a customary patriotic epic.

**War novel**  
The scope of McCrumb's "King's Mountain" enables her to show how war works. It depicts the activities of a thousand-man army over the period, August through October 1780 — and the narrative is wonderfully digestible.

It becomes clear that getting several militias to combine at one time — and get funded without government support — is a kind of miracle.

First, we meet the commanders. With Col. Charles McDowell, his few hundred men, and his Quaker Meadows support being critical components for success, the other leaders encounter a problem.

As the ranking officer, McDowell should be commander of joint forces, but Col. Andrew Hampton blames McDowell for the death of his son when McDowell failed to guard a camp that was subsequently raided by British dragoons. And all of the others agree that McDowell had failed to pursue the enemy after Mangrove Mill.

The politics are entertaining, as are the side stories, which boost the novel with additional doses of Scott's hardiness and haintedness.

Early on, Sevier rides to Powder Creek in Carter County, Tenn., to seek out Mary Patton, who's

busy among horribly smelling pots, making gunpowder from bat guano.

Her three daughters are in the nearby stream, "as solemn as owls." Each of them is "holding a corner of a large white cloth, stained with red streaks." The oldest girl points at Sevier and moans.

"Oh," Mary comments about the game, "they call it being washers at the ford," or "bean-sidde" in Celtic. In the old tale, meeting such a fairy spirit prophesizes imminent death.

He visualizes how molten lead is dropped through a tower into cold water to harden into spheres, not unlike how "molten earth had tumbled through the heavens."

Then, he reports that "that thought flashed through my head in less time than it took to load the pellet and fire my weapon, and then the tide of the battle swept me away again."

We are swept away. Find a longer version of this story online at CITIZEN-TIMES.com. King Rob Neufeld writes the weekly book forum for the Sunday Citizen-Times. He is the author and editor of four books, and the host of the website The Book on Wine. Contact him at [RobNeufeld@charter.net](mailto:RobNeufeld@charter.net) or 505-973.

**LITERARY CALENDAR**

From staff reports  
You guide to author and literary events in Western North Carolina. Sept. 22-28.

**Today**  
**TREY CARLAND:** Author discusses his book, "A Sevier's Guide to Inner Peace," and holds a related workshop at City Lights Bookstore, 3 E. Jackson St., Sylva, 1 p.m. Call 586-5499.  
**STEVE LITTLE:** Author and Marion mayor presents a dramatic production from his book, "I, Annie, Nita, and Connie," at the Orchard at Altapass, 1025 Orchard Road, Spruce Pine, 2:30 p.m. Call 765-9531.

**STORYTELLING:** The Appalachian School of Holistic Herbalism presents "An Evening with an Old-Fashioned Elder" at 2 Westwood Place, Asheville, 6 p.m. Call 356-1221.

**Monday**  
**JOY LADIN:** Jewish transgender poet presents a poetry reading, "The Definition of Joy," in the Laurel Forum at UNC Asheville's Karpov Hall, 1 University Heights, Asheville, 3 p.m. Call 252-5027.  
**ASHER LEIGH:** Local musician discusses the use of the creative process in "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 254-6734.  
**JOY LADIN:** Jewish transgender poet gives a talk, "Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Gardens," in the Mission Health

Mountaintop View Room at UNC Asheville's Sherill Center, 1 University Heights, Asheville, 7:30 p.m. Call 252-6027.

**Tuesday**  
**DAVE WITH NELLE:** Local author Victoria S. Blase and illustrator Virginia "Ginny" Palmer present their children's book set at the Billmore House at the McDowell County Public Library, 90 W. Court St., Marion, 3 p.m. Call 652-2858.  
**RENIETTE LAZARIDS**  
**POWER:** Author presents her debut novel, "The Other House," at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 254-6734.

**Wednesday**  
**GREGG BLANTON:** Marriage and family therapist P. Gregg Blanton discusses his new book, "Mind Over Marriage," at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 254-6734.

Visit [CITIZEN-TIMES.com](http://CITIZEN-TIMES.com) to see the full Literary Calendar.

**POETRY READINGS:** Asheville City Poets, with poet Caleb Brewer, present poetry readings at Vanantta-Kava Bar, 15 Eagle St., Asheville, 9 p.m. Call 955-8118.

**Thursday**  
**V.E. SCHRAB:** Author presents her new novel, "Vicarious," at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 254-6734.  
**GARY CARDEN:** Storyteller presents his new book, "Appalachian Identity," at the Macon County Public Library, 149 Silver Farm Road, Franklin, 5 p.m. Call 524-3600.

**Friday**  
**ANN B. BOSS:** Author of the Mia Jullia series gives a talk, at Fourteenth Bookstore, 608 W. Main St., Hendersonville, 5:30 p.m. \$5 admission; space is limited. Call 897-8039.  
**LYN FORD:** Storyteller and author of "Africanian Tales" shares "Home Fried Tales," stories rooted in her storytelling traditions in the Marketplace Room at UNC Asheville's Raulser Center, 1 University Heights, Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 251-6340.  
**BOB RIMAN:** Author presents his latest novel, "The Governor's Lady," at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 7 p.m. Call 254-6734.

Please send event information at least two weeks in advance to [RobNeufeld@charter.net](mailto:RobNeufeld@charter.net).

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